

TOUGH TOPICS

Spiritual Milestone Questions

"How do I help my child to make a decision about salvation?"

"How do I know if my child is ready for baptism?"

Some of the most important spiritual conversations we will have with our children are also the ones we may not always feel confident about. As a family pastor, questions such as "How do I help my child to make a decision about salvation?," "How do I know if my child is ready for baptism?," and "When should my child take communion for the first time?" are the most common that I receive.

While there are differing opinions within Christianity about such milestones, **my position has been one of "readiness" rather than chronological age.** So how does a parent determine readiness?

1. Does your child show interest in conversations about God, Jesus, and the Bible?
2. Does your child show curiosity and ask follow-up questions when you talk about these things?
3. When teaching your child about how Jesus wants us to live (kindness, forgiveness, sacrifice, service, etc.), do you see a desire to align with such character qualities?
4. Does your child show joy in following God or sorrow when disobedient?
5. Does your child show eagerness to participate in church or other church-related activities?
6. Does your child show attentiveness to prayer or remind you to pray if you neglect it?
7. Has your child asked you to participate in any of these things?

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

“When should my child take communion for the first time?”

These questions help you gauge the “readiness of heart” in your child versus simply your child’s ability to participate in “religious behaviors.” As you discern the heart of your child longing to engage with the heart of God, your child is ready to make a first choice to follow Jesus.

The first “yes” is often in a prayer of confession of sin and surrender of life choices to obey Jesus, accompanied by gratitude for the gift of salvation and being part of the family of God. **There will be many more “yes” moments in the journey of faith as your child grows and learns more about what it means to live the Christian life.**

Since baptism is an **outward expression of an inward decision**, baptism follows a salvation decision. Baptism is a public proclamation of one’s faith decision and should be done when a child expresses a desire to do so. It’s important to allow our children to see others in the family of God getting baptized so they have the opportunity to sense when they are ready to do the same. Often children will see baptism and salvation as one in the same, but it is important for parents to help them see that they are separate decisions. **The first is a personal response to God’s invitation of grace while the second is a public response to tell others about their salvation decision.**

Communion, from a biblical point of view, is for believers who have chosen to wholeheartedly follow Jesus with their lives. Flowing out of the discourse Jesus gave at the Last Supper, **Christians take communion to remember Jesus’ death and the sacrifice He made on the cross to forgive our sins.** Children are ready to take communion when they have accepted Jesus into their hearts and lives, have chosen to follow Him, and understand that Christ’s death has saved them. **Taking communion is an act of worship to commune with Jesus in a personal way, remembering and thanking Him for His provision of grace.**

Practically speaking ...

SALVATION DECISION

Some children are ready to make a salvation decision to follow Jesus as early as preschool, while others delay this decision into their junior and senior high years. While we can create an environment for discussion and even give opportunities to make this decision, it must be done when a child determines this commitment for him/herself.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3:16-17).

BAPTISM

This often takes place sometime between the elementary years and teenage years for kids raised in Christian homes and are a part of a church community, but others delay this decision well into their adult years.

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20).

COMMUNION

Based on the rhythm of your church, children will be exposed to communion at differing ages. As long as your children have made a decision to follow Jesus, communion can be taken at any age, providing they enter into it with a posture of gratitude for the sacrifice of what the elements of the cup and the bread represent—the shed blood and broken body of Jesus.

“And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you’” (Luke 22:19-20).

Engaging in spiritual conversations, exposing your children to others who are participating in these milestones, and sharing your own experiences can all add meaning and support to these beautiful sacraments of our faith.

I encourage you to celebrate these milestones of salvation, baptism, and communion with those in your family and faith community. Take pictures, record videos, and surround your children with those who will bless them and support their decisions and faith moments throughout their entire lives.

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